Why Bill Gates is More Influential Than Steve Jobs

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The history of computers, and computer science as we know it, has been largely shaped by two men, and their respective companies: Steve Jobs, with Apple, and Bill Gates with Microsoft. While both have caused notable changes in the industry, one would have to be arguably more influential than the other.

While many would say it was Steve Jobs- what with the iPod, iPad and the “first computer”, it’s important to note that many of his great inventions weren’t something he specifically invented. He simply had a good public image, design skills and the ability to market things. While he did make MP3 players, tablets, and personal computers more widespread, none of these were original inventions.

The first computer would be ENIAC, which took up an entire house and could only solve maths problems, but as for the personal computer, the Programma 101, which was designed by an italian company in the 60s, would be the first personal desktop PC. However the IBM 5100, or Xerox Alto are more likely to be considered the true personal computer. The Alto featured a graphical interface, as well as a mouse and is often credited as having inspired both Jobs and Gates into developing the systems that they did.

The first MP3 player was not the iPod, but the Saehan/Eiger MPMan(in 1997), as well as the Diamond Rio(1998), which helped spark interest in MP3 players, which is likely what inspired Jobs. The iPod wasn’t released until 2001, and although it did contain a lot more memory than the before mentioned MP3 players, (a 5GB hard drive, vs 32MB of flash memory,) this wasn’t anything notably large for the time, and Archos had released a player with a 6GB hard drive shortly prior.

The iPad wasn’t at all a new idea. Tablet computers have been around since the 2000s in many ways. While the iPad featured iOS, which was a bit more suited for the device and provided longer battery life than a tablet running windows, it also missed out on some of the features a device with a full fledged operating system would boast. For example, most tablet computers prior to the iPad’s release featured keyboards which would pivot away from the computer before it was used as a tablet, as well as styluses for more specific drawing, etc. However, these tablets were often pricey and not widely used. A notable example of a potential market friendly tablet prior to the iPad would be the Microsoft Courier, which featured two displays, a mobile operating system that was centered around a “journal” to store ideas. The project was however defunded once Ballmer took over Microsoft.

Aside from the lack of originality displayed by Jobs, Bill Gates also managed a feat that made him far more wealthy than Steve Jobs, and arguably was the one most influential decision in the history of personal computing. From the invention of MS DOS onwards, instead of letting the software be bought out by any one company (likely, IBM), he instead offered to license his software to *any* company that could pay the fees and wanted to install Microsoft software on it’s personal computers.

While the income from licensing fees made Gates a very rich man, this also had a notable effect on the computer industry from that point onwards. Instead of computer companies going through separate software developers to develop an operating system for their PC and their PC only, it caused the manufacturers to go to a single source for it’s software- Microsoft. This caused a standardization in operating systems, which had prior to this point been proprietary to each individual PC. This also meant a large leap forward in software development for non-microsoft companies, because they now only had a few systems to develop for, rather than a plethora of different operating systems to be compatible on.

Without this change in the way companies operated, we likely wouldn’t have the current operating system playing field of today, which is Microsoft Windows, which can be installed on any PC and is the most widely available, Linux, which provides an open source and free alternative, and Apple’s OSX, which is only used on Apple computers. Windows, as it is the most widely used (forming around 90% of operating system market share, vs. 3.75% for OSX) boasts much more software than either of the two options, especially in sectors such as video gaming.

Windows is used more by schools and businesses as well, since it provides lower licensing fees for the two, as well as the costs associated with the machines being less than to purchase macs. Windows can be installed on a range of devices, from MSI, Acer, and Asus to Toshiba, HP and Dell, and in form factors ranging from netbooks to high powered tower computers. With OSX? You have the macbook line, the iMac, or the Mac Mini.

Lastly, Bill Gates’ lasting effect on the world likely won’t be only felt on the computer industry. While he was elemental in bringing forward the information age of today, and has moved the industry a far way forward, today he is less focused on technology. In 1994 he and his wife founded the *Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,* a private foundation dedicated to “the interests and passions of the Gates family”, which their website currently describes as education, world health and population, and community giving in the Pacific Northwest. One of his most notable causes has been his attempts to eradicate Malaria completely, which would make a massive difference in the world, even after the rest of the world has moved on from Bill Gates; changes in the computer industry. This is possibly the most influential thing he will do, and if he does eradicate the disease, it will mean a long lasting legacy, even after his death.

Works Cited

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